

**The Joy of Walking... And Walking.... And
Walking...**

A Guide For Serious Walkers

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An Important Notice To Our Readers

The intention of the information provided in this book is to alleviate some of the challenges that are created when one decides to do an activity that is out of the ordinary.

Long Distance walking and hiking are very challenging sports that are made even more challenging by poor preparation. My desire in writing this book is to get you out and walking in a manner that is fun, safe and productive.

In some chapters I make mention of certain medical issues that can impede a walker's progress either if they are existing conditions or conditions that manifest themselves along the path.

I do not profess to be an expert in the field of medicine, nutrition or outfitting. The information I provide is intended to be a guide to assist the reader in their preparation for their adventures.

I strongly urge any person who is planning to do walking, hiking or any other exercise that requires more effort than is a regular part of their daily life to get advice from professionals regarding their current situation and how they can improve their situation to allow them to get out and enjoy this big crazy world.

There is a lot to see out there! Come on with me as we enjoy every step of the way!

Monty C. Ritchings

Section 1

Chapter 1 Introduction

The joy of walking... and walking... and walking...



Only one who walks long distances can really understand and enjoy the pleasure that comes with trekking the miles along the streets, trails and shores. The sheer pleasure of feeling one foot hit the ground after the other for countless hours without a concern in the world.

Only long distance walking allows a person to truly get to know and be part of the beauty that continually surrounds us on this planet we call home.

I dedicate this book to everyone who loves our planet and enjoys soaking up what God has provided for our enjoyment one step at a time.

Through these pages you will gain access to much useful information pertinent to safe and enjoyable walking.

My goal is to help you get down the road as safely, comfortably and enjoyably as possible.

I truly hope this book satisfies your need for information about long distance walking so that you can grow into your walking shoes through many miles of personal connection with yourself and your planet.

Enjoy!

Monty Ritchings

Chapter 2

Walking As A Sport

Human beings are designed to walk.

Walking is the most important exercise we are capable of participating in. Walking needs to be done regularly for a reasonable period of time in order to let it help you maintain your best possible health.

Here are some great quotes about walking.

“Few people know how to take a walk. The qualifications are endurance, plain clothes, old shoes, an eye for nature, good humor, vast curiosity, good speech, good silence and nothing too much.” ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.” ~John Muir

In this book the focus on walking is about enjoyable walking, not competitive walking. This style of walking is a healthy sport that only challenges you through your own development as you get out and enjoy the world one easy, casual step at a time.

Long distance walking is considered a sport because it requires good health and endurance to complete the miles of steps that happen as the scenery unfolds before you.

Walking, as you will discover through these pages is different than running. It is different in the type of equipment one uses and the mechanics of how the muscles operate as the body moves.

Hiking is a form of long distance walking. Generally, the terrain determines whether it is a walk or a hike since “hiking” usually refers to walking on trails away from populated areas. However, the words are synonymous with each other when it comes down to it!

All the equipment used in hiking can be used in long distance walking.

What determines if a walk is long distance or not?

You do.

As your ability for churning out the miles develops your perception of how long “long” is will change.

If you are currently a novice at getting off the couch, long distance walking could be just going to the end of the block.

As you gain your stride, the distances will increase until that same old body that used to struggle with a couple short blocks now has turned into a veritable powerhouse of muscle that churns out mile after mile with only a modicum of perspiration. “Long” expands from a few short blocks to many miles.

My personal record to date is 27 miles in one day! Not likely to be repeated too soon but 10 miles for me is considered a starting walk and 20 miles is a good day.

My other personal record was completed at the time of writing this book. I walked the full length of the Camino Frances from Saint Jean Pied de Port France to Santiago de Compostela Spain-**500 miles in 34 days.**

Over my whole trip my only complaint was four blisters on my feet!

And they were eliminated completely within one week of their arrival! Read on and let me tell you how.

And yet another goal was achieved when I returned to St. Jean Pied de Port in September 2017 to walk the famous trail again. I foolishly completed the journey again in even less time causing myself personal injury which has taken over a year to recuperate from.

As I update this little book in 2019, I read through the information included with a strong desire to really help you by providing adequate information so you can manage your dream walks without any personal sacrifice or injury.

Prevention of injury to yourself whether it be physically, mentally or financially by truly preparing beforehand, will help you to enjoy your adventure much more than by listening to your ego take you into “Superman” mode like mine did causing a big price to be paid later.

I cannot tell you how many people I saw while walking the Camino who ended up going home early because they did not prepare properly.

Long distance walking is not “A Walk in the Park”!

Take advice early and be well prepared and well trained!

Chapter 3

Tips for Walking

No matter why or how far you walk, having a good understanding of some important aspects of the science of walking are helpful so you can gain the most out of your time. Without this knowledge fully embedded in your brain and your life your enjoyment of walking will be more limited and could potentially be harmful to you in the long haul.

After all, at least from my perspective, walking is supposed to be an enjoyable experience no matter why, how long or where you are walking! So let's make it as positive and enjoyable as possible.

One of the key areas of focus to me when I talk about long distance walking is recognizing and valuing what goes on in my mind as I walk.

As you begin to pile on the miles, you will discover that what is going on in your mind will have a huge impact on how much you enjoy the sport.

Here is a note I made to myself in my diary I kept as I developed my walking skills:

As I was out walking today, I paid attention to what I was feeling and thinking about as I moved along. I tend to like to walk in areas that stay away from heavy traffic and close to or in nature so I do not have to overly concern myself with outside influences.

I do find though that even if I am surrounded by beautiful nature, if I am not careful, I can let myself get caught up in the noise going on in my head. If I have a particular struggle in some part of my life that is trying to gain my attention, I can easily forget the joy and purpose in my walking. And let the noise take over.

When I allow myself to get caught up in my mental drama I become a "head case", I notice that I walk looking down to the ground (which is terrible body mechanics!). I also feel a lot heavier making it much more difficult to walk. I tend to stumble more and every ache in my body comes out to play.

Mind noise really can make a mess out of a good walk!

So what to do?

Being that you are already out walking, you are halfway there! Here are some other possible helpers:

- Pick a place to walk that you really enjoy
- Make sure you are dressed comfortably in a way that makes you feel good

- Take time to stop regularly and really look at and enjoy the scenery around you. Concentrate on the scenery rather than what is going on in your head.
- Breathe! Make it your practice to always “belly breathe” so your abdomen moves up and down with each breath you take whether walking or not. Enjoy the feel and the taste of the fresh air. Feel how it invigorates you!
- Bring yourself something nice to eat while you walk. Something with good flavours that you really like and enjoy.
- Drink lots of refreshing water as you walk. If you are out for a long walk then take something to increase your electrolytes before you go. Avoid highly caffeinated drinks or energy drinks to give you an energy boost as you may find that you crash before you have finished the walk. Then what are you going to do? Drink more?
- Walk with a good friend whose company you enjoy. Chat about good things. Enjoy the feeling of walking together.
- Look up at the sun and let its energy flow into your body and fill you up with its good energy.
- Try to focus on happy thoughts and know that you can resolve whatever is bugging you.
- If a thought is really persistent, at least write it down, so it doesn’t feel it is being ignored. If you are good at analyzing your own stuff you could even use the walk as a time for coming up with healthy ways of dealing with the issue, but try to do it enjoyably!
- If you have to be “plugged in” while you walk at least listen to something that is inspiring or educational. Personally, I never carry artificial or external entertainment with me when I walk. I like to hear what my head has to say! And it has a lot to say!

The important point is to enjoy yourself. This alone will propel you into walking more.

Chapter 4

Personal Safety

Maintaining personal safety is an absolute must in every phase of life including when you are participating in long distance walking. Before you begin this sport, it is essential that you determine what you need in order to feel safe while you are out.

As you develop your skill and the miles start piling on, your perception of safety and the equipment you require will change.

I am a firm believer in the power of thought. What you truly believe will always come true. Therefore it is essential that you develop and maintain a safe and healthy mindset as you walk.

This may take some work. What you will need to do is determine what you need to know or have with you in order to feel both comfortable and safe. Here are some suggestions to help you develop a positive sense of safety:

- Predetermine the route you are planning to take by taking into consideration:
 - The location of the route.
 - What the route passes through such as campgrounds, villages, rough terrain, heavy forest, etc
 - The elevation changes in the route
 - The type of ground the path is composed of
 - Weather
 - Available pit stops for bathroom breaks and refuelling
 - The length of the walk

- Other considerations are:
 - Who you will be walking with
 - Who or what else might be on the trail with you
 - What kind of wildlife might you encounter
 - Is the region of the walk managed by an organization
 - What kind of clothing will you need (including footwear)
 - Will you need walking poles or other support devices
 - What will the weather be like and will you run into darkness
 - What is your level of capability for completing the walk

The more knowledge you have of the factors that could impact your walk, the safer you will feel.

One of the most important actions you can take is to let someone else know where you are going and what your itinerary is.

Having a GPS (Global Positioning System) to assist you in keeping on track is also useful, especially if the trail is new to you. However, in the event that you need to be found, having someone knowing where to look makes a huge difference and could save your life.

Pay attention to your thoughts as you prepare for the walk (in particular any thought that is related to your plans). Sometimes your subconscious can really save you from needless danger.

As in anything in life, good preparation will often save the day and help you to have a fun and safe walk.

A final point regarding what you believe particularly when walking alone is to visualize yourself as being really big. This may sound ridiculous but I know of many people who have found themselves in dangerous situations but managed to get through them unscathed just by holding themselves really big in their mind.

Chapter 5

Safety Devices

Having the right equipment for the walk you are doing will allow you to relax and enjoy your adventure more easily and may make the difference in your arriving back home safely.

All kinds of products are available on the market for helping you to be safe on your journey. By pre-planning your trip well you can increase the likelihood of your being safe all through the trip. There are two categories of products to be considered under safety devices.

- **Products that help you stay safe**
- **Products that help you out when an emergency arises.**

Products that keep you safe

- Compass
- GPS or Global Positioning System
- Maps
- Cell phone
- Fire arms
- Walking Poles
- Sun tan lotion
- Bug Spray
- Matches
- Repair kit for Back pack and for other equipment that get damaged
- Rain Gear
- Watch

Even though we have really great electronic equipment available today that can assist in improving our safety, it is foolhardy in my books to rely on them alone. A good map and a compass are mandatory, especially if walking away from populated areas.

Products that help you out in case of an emergency

- Bear Spray
- Matches
- Hunting Knife
- First Aid kit
- Cell phone or other communication device with appropriate apps downloaded for the location you will be traveling in.
- Flashlight and/or headlamp
- Whistle
- Hi energy snacks

- Emergency Blanket
- Knife
- Water and/or portable water filter
- First aid kit

As part of your pre-planning you will have to determine what equipment you will need for your walk. Even if you are just out for an evening stroll, it may be handy to have some of these products mentioned.

At the very least if you are going out; let someone know where you are going and when you expect to be back. When you get back, let them know you have returned.

Another consideration, especially if you are going on a long journey to a foreign country that is especially important is extra health insurance. It is something you never want to leave home without. Take the time to understand the provisions of your own government or regular health insurance in regards to foreign travel and be sure to supplement it with insurance to cover you adequately for the time you are out of the country even if it is just popping over the border to the neighbouring country for a day.

No matter how much you pay for good travel insurance, it won't be too much if you get hurt or sick!

Speaking of foreign travel, another essential device is your cell phone or tablet. You can get pay as you go phones in most areas of the world for reasonable prices; however, you could get by with just your home phone on airplane mode and use WIFI where you can.

The reason this is highlighted is that I want to stress that even a limited use cell phone has emergency contact capabilities. It also allows you to use Google Translator if you are in a region where you do not speak the language.

Even second rate translations are better than walking away from help because you don't know how to receive help.

I used it both times and had a ball with it. Got lost 7 times the first round and got rescued times, all because of Google Translator!

Section 2

Chapter 6

Conditioning Yourself for Walking

When I walked the Camino in Spain, I noticed that it was the people who did not pre-train before setting off in an attempt to walk the 500 miles that suffered the greatest set backs on the walk.

Preparing yourself beforehand to endure the long miles and hardships is essential to keeping yourself safe, healthy and happy. **We are not kin to Superman!!!**

Personally, I trained for two years in my home area doing day walks and working out in the gym before I attempted walking the Camino. I am glad I did because, even with the conditioning, I found walking long distance daily for over a month was very challenging. However, in comparison to many others, and in particular younger walkers, I completed the walk with minimal suffering or injuries because I had prepared so well.

Body Mechanics

Understanding how the human body works mechanically will help you to understand how your own body is working. Once you understand your own imperfections and challenges, you can correct them through therapy and exercise. After all, the more your body moves as originally designed, the easier it is for you to walk and enjoy the freedom of movement.

A body that is well aligned moves more easily and provides a more pleasurable, energy efficient experience.

The truth is that no matter what activity you are participating in, you will only be as effective as your body will allow you to be. So many people I see as I am out walking have such poor body mechanics I really wonder how they survive the pain and discomfort they must feel as they force themselves to push past the resistance their body has created by their lack of good body mechanics.



Knowing how your body moves is essential not only for ease of walking but for general health.

One of the most common issues I see is feet turned out of alignment. Either their feet are turned out or in instead of pointing straight ahead. In the picture below, look at how this person's feet turn in.

This positioning of the leg structure can only cause extra stress and potential damage to the muscles, bones and tissues of the area.

If this person continues to run or walk distances with their mechanics in this condition, they can only expect to suffer more and more as their body contends with this posture. The remedy for this is some good (and ongoing) treatment from a medical professional such as a massage therapist or chiropractor plus a good regimen of exercises specifically designed to overcome this situation specifically chosen by a professional physical trainer.

Personally, I believe no matter whether you are just out for an evening walk or you are a serious walker, having regular sessions with a professional physical trainer to assess and assist you in improving and maintaining your best mobility is an absolute necessity. The more you are out there; the more critical it is for you to maintain good body mechanics.

It does not matter how old you are when it comes to maintaining or retraining your body mechanics.

If you are young, then you need to correct any problems while your body is flexible so you won't have to deal with the larger problem it creates when you are older and less flexible.

If you are older, keeping your body mechanics in alignment is essential to keep you younger and more fit and to help reduce pain and the likelihood of injuries.

Good body mechanics is not just about moving your legs and feet. Walking is a whole body activity. For the best possible experience now and for the long term it is essential to understand what good body mechanics are and how your body operates to give you the best possible free flow of movement as you were designed to have.

So head up, shoulders square and feet straight forward! Everything pointing in the same direction and off you go!



Good posture makes walking easy

Chapter 7

Feeding Your Body

A body can only run its best when it has good hydration and good nutrition to help it along.

Many people walk to lose weight. Often in this process, they become discouraged because they end up doing exactly the opposite. How come?

There are several reasons why their weight either stays the same or decreases. The most obvious being that muscle mass is denser than fat therefore your body weight may not change or may even increase. However! You probably feel a whole lot better, and that is what counts! Therefore, body weight should not be considered alone when trying to determine whether or not the walking is helping.

In order to get the best results from your walking program, it is essential that a good nutritional program be instituted and maintained. After all, if your body is not getting the nutrition it requires to do the walking before or during the walk, it will likely cause you to binge eat once you are back home because you are so hungry.

If this happens you have likely just eliminated all the benefits of your walk!

Find yourself a good fitness program focussed on nutrition that will specifically allow you to understand what your own body needs. You will soon discover that the foods you used to eat and what your healthy body needs as a serious walker are very different!

You will need plenty of carbohydrates for your walk. Having a good lunch packed full of carb filled foods such as:

Fruits	Vegetables	Nuts	Seeds
Wholegrain breads	Yogurt		

These foods will help supply the energy you need to complete your walk easily. It is always good to have a supply with you as you walk as well.

Eating many small portions per day is better than eating only large meals, especially in order to separate your carbs from the proteins to make absorption easier.

Once you finish the walk, replenishing your protein needs will help to feed your muscles and maintain healthy body mass.

Proteins include:

Any meats, fish or eggs or cheese

Vegetable proteins such as beans and legumes

Electrolytes are an absolute must for any sport requiring exertion. The electrolytes act as a messenger to the muscles to get them to fire properly as you walk so there is less resistance in the actions required to move your body down the path. I personally prefer pure electrolytes in the form of drops that go under your tongue as opposed to commercially produced drinks that are filled with sugar and other unnecessary ingredients that will actually undermine what the electrolytes are designed to do.

Effective hydration is an absolute must. Being that you are exerting yourself while you are walking, you will be perspiring. You need to replace the water loss so your body can continue the process of hydration effectively. Make sure the water is maintained at a consistent temperature you like so that you will want to drink it.

Another aspect of keeping yourself fueled for making a large exertion is maintaining and replacing minerals in your body. Magnesium and potassium are two of the most important. Long-term perspiring can cause the minerals to be depleted. Shortage of adequate minerals can cause muscle cramps.

Section 3

Chapter 8

Preparing for Your Journey

No matter whether you are planning a long distance walking trip, a hike in the mountains or even a holiday in a foreign country, there are some essential aspects that will make your trip both more enjoyable and safer.

I am a true believer that knowledge is king. In this, preparing for any trip you are doing requires gathering good information about what you are planning to do and where you are going to do it.

The most important task in preparing is determining what makes this trip different from others; then gather any pertinent information relevant to the new trip.

Whether it is a hike, a long distance walk or a distant holiday it is absolutely essential to know:

- What is the climate, geography, expected weather of the area?
- How remote is your journey?
- How will you get to the start of your trip?
- How will you get back from the terminus of your trip?
- What kinds of services are available during the trip? What kinds of services do you need?
- What language(s) are spoken in the area you are going to? How will you deal with a foreign language?
- What is the currency? How does this currency exchange with yours?
- How much money will you need and in what currencies?
- Very important! What customs of the region could impact your enjoyment, comfort and safety?
- Is the area considered safe to visit?
- What kinds of issues could you encounter that could impact your safety or enjoyment?
- What kind of equipment will you need to maximize your safety and enjoyment?
- What infrastructure exists and how do you access it in case of an emergency?
- What kind of food is common there? How will you nourish yourself?
- Water! Huge issue! How safe is the water to drink, or brush your teeth?
- What do you want to do when you are there?
- Where are you going to stay?
- Can I go out exploring safely on my own?

Some examples that come to mind during international travels I have done are:

- In Jamaica there is often much confusion about which currency to use when shopping, the value of the local currency can vary from store to store, Makes it tough to stay on budget.
- In Costa Rica, at least in the 1990s, men wearing long hair were very much in danger of being beaten up because it was not an acceptable hair style in that country at that time.
- Want to experience "Montezuma's Revenge"? Just drink the local water in China. Just brushing your teeth with unfiltered water and you can guarantee being entertained in your hotel room for days!
- I ordered toast with marmalade with my very limited Spanish in Costa Rica and was treated to French fries for breakfast.
- In many countries it is common to wear your pack on your front to prevent pickpocketing. (Might be tough with a heavy pack though!)

For walking and hiking it is essential, for example:

- To know what footwear to wear, or even to carry an alternative pair if the terrain or weather changes.
- Carry a water filter to remove microbes that can cause digestive issues.
- To know trail conditions so you know if you can complete your planned walk or if an alternative route is necessary.

There are so many issues that can arise on any walk, whether a Sunday stroll or a month long trek. Good preparation will dramatically increase your success, safety and enjoyment.

Chapter 9

Clothing

What you wear when you walk is so important! It can be the difference between having a good walk and one you would rather forget. What you wear is contingent on several factors:

- Where you are going?
- How long you are going for?
- The type of walk you are doing?
- The type of terrain you expect?
- Whether you will be camping out or sleeping each night in a building such as a hotel, your home or a hostel
- The weather expected.
- What support facilities are available along the way such as laundromats and cafes?

The one thing I have learned in my journeying is to expect the unexpected. You just never know when a weather shift could happen or if the trip might take longer due to unexpected circumstances.

I like to dress in layers. It gives me more ability to manage my personal comfort than if I wear something heavy to reduce the number of layers I need. As well, something thin is easier to store away than something thicker and will usually dry faster.

Rain gear is another essential. I tried wearing a poncho but found that all the water it kept off my body poured onto my pant legs, so what was the point. Now I wear a nice light rain proof jacket and pants with a wider brimmed hat. Works for me!

Pants are always a concern too. Long pants get too hot in the day while shorts are too cold early and late, so if you are on long hikes, combination pants that allow the lower leg to be removed are ideal.

Removable leggings contribute about 10 degrees to your overall body heat. They are a great way to manage your comfort.

The right hat can be a great blessing on any trip. Every trip either has issues with rain, too much sun or maybe even bugs. The beauty of hats is they don't take much space so there is little reason to leave it at home. Get a really floppy hat made of a flexible material such as linen so it is convenient to store. Bring a sombrero and you will soon be tossing it!

I have been researching the world of Merino Wool and Bamboo clothing lately. They appear to be the ideal materials for any clothing you need. Although quite pricey while sitting on the rack, the idea of not having to make the focus of my long trek from

Laundromat to Laundromat appeals to me. The great thing about both these products is that they can be worn for several days with no discomfort and no smell!

They sure save a lot of space in the kit bag too!

Just hang them out at night or pin them on the outside of your backpack when you are not wearing them to let them air out. Guaranteed they will be fresh as a daisy after only a couple of hours.

Chapter 10

Your Feet

Of all of the parts of the body, the feet do the most work and have the greatest impact on your ability to walk and enjoyment of the sport.

In order to truly get the most out of your walk, appreciating and looking after your feet are an essential component. After all, the condition of your feet and how you treat them are going to determine how well you can move.

Pay attention to your feet and lavish them with massages and warm baths. Keep your nails trimmed and smooth.

Happy Feet mean Happy Miles!

Shoes

If you are going to walk, wear the right shoes!

One of the most common issues I see with people walking (and admittedly I have fallen into this trap myself) is this business about what to wear on your feet.

Recently, I did a number of walks down in the Tucson Arizona area. Foolishly I had thought I was saving myself a bunch of money when I bought some hiking boots for about \$20.

Well! After about 20 miles, the heel of my left boot caved in causing my ankle to sit off centre. By the time I had done all the hikes and returned home, my \$20 dollar boots cost me an additional \$130 in massage therapy fees.

My new boots interestingly enough were cheap in comparison. They only cost me \$130! They served me well over the next year's training sessions and the full 500 miles of the Camino. (In fact, I still use them regularly now that I am back home.)

Wearing shoes that do not support your feet, do not protect them from rocks and other objects on the pathways or do not help them feel good as you walk are very counterproductive.

If you insist on wearing ill-fitting shoes or open toed sandals, you will eventually pay the price by hurting your feet or getting blisters or you will just quit walking.

Something that is important to understand when selecting footwear for walking is that shoes worn for walking are not the same as shoes worn for running.

If you watch a person who is running, you will see that when their foot hits the ground, the first point that hits is the ball of the foot followed by the heel. However, when the same person is walking, the heel is the first to hit. Because of this difference, the mechanics of the shoe designed for the purpose is unique to that purpose.

The type of footwear you wear for walking should be determined by the type of walking you are doing. Walking shoes that are low cut are great on sidewalks, however, if you are on a serious trail; full hiking boots are your best friend. They protect your ankles and support you on hills and rough trails.

From my own personal experience, I almost injured myself quite seriously when I wore hiking sandals on a steep gravel trail. Fortunately, I had my walking poles with me. They saved the day... and my ankles!

The type of sole of the footwear is essential as well. The sole should be pliable enough to allow you to walk naturally. Shoes with a rigid sole cause your muscles to work too hard.

When you go to buy a pair of walking boots, pre-buy your insoles and bring them with you so you can try the footwear with them inserted. Do not buy them after.

You might find that the boots you end up buying are a 1/2 size bigger but that is good as it leaves room for insoles and thick socks. Boots that are too tight or too loose will end you trip quickly.

When you are looking at new boots as well, turn the boot upside down; grab the toe with one hand and the back of the boot with the other. Make sure the sole bends easily. Boots with hard soles are not meant for long distance walking and will cause you a great deal of grief when misused.

Lastly, buy your boots and wear them for months before you go on a bigger journey.

End of story; Wear the shoes that are designed for the task. Your feet and back will appreciate your decision in the long run.

Insoles are a good consideration when determining what will be going on your feet. If you have high arches or insteps or any other anomaly in the construction of your feet, or if you just want to increase the comfort level, insoles are a good consideration.

I personally like a thick insole that provides more cushion under my heel. I also like good arch support to keep my foot in position by not allowing the foot muscles to stretch more than necessary.

Recently I also discovered that a good set of insoles that are curved on the outer perimeter can be inserted into good walking sandals to help support the feet and keep

rocks out. If you want to put insoles into your sandals though, you will need to Velcro them in or they will slide out very quickly as you walk. The major advantage to walking sandals is that they allow more air flow around your feet so they stay cooler, however, good boots are just better for all around walking.

Socks

Wearing the right socks is as important as wearing the right shoes!

Have you ever worn socks that would not stay up or how about socks with a hole in the toe? Not very comfortable is it!

There are other aspects about socks that are just as important such as

- the material the socks are made of,
- age and health of the sock (don't wear darned socks for walking)
- the thickness of the socks
- padding in heavier impact points
- height of the sock on your leg
- ability of the socks to keep your feet comfortable
- keeping your feet dry
- The ability of the socks to vet perspiration

This is another region of clothing where I feel that bamboo and merino wool are a good consideration. They wick perspiration better than synthetic materials and generally last longer.

Be careful when choosing socks to determine how high the socks ride on your legs. The height of the sock needs to be adjusted according to the season. High riding socks in summer can cause great discomfort as your body retains too much heat in the area.

In a recent long distance walking experience I discovered two valuable issues worthy of note about socks. Firstly, socks that are made of a rough material such as some wool will “sand” the bottoms of your feet as you walk.

Secondly, change your socks every few hours as you walk. Dry socks reduce the likelihood of blisters forming. Just hang the alternate pair on the outside of your backpack so they can air and dry as you walk.

Another subject while we are discussing feet is the business of protecting your feet so you can reduce the development of blisters, torn nails and other fun ending situations. Here are some good tips for your feet:

- Keep your toe nails trimmed and filed to prevent them from snagging your socks or pushing into the toe of your shoe

- Apply petroleum Jelly to any area you find subjected to blisters, usually around your toes and under the foot pad and around the heel. (I actually like using mentholated jelly on my feet as the mentholated helps to relax the muscles. Be careful not to apply too much though or your feet might become slippery.
- You can also apply moleskin to areas that are potentially at risk such as the heels.
- Make sure you wear the right size shoes for you. If you are going to insert insoles into your shoes, have them with you when you buy your shoes so you can ensure a good fit. It is good to leave a little room at the toes as well in case your feet stretch from all those miles. (My feet actually required a one size larger boot after about a year of walking)
- For longer walks, bring an extra pair of shoes especially if there could be unexpected weather changes or if there are varying types of terrains. Boots also can get quite hot on summer hikes. It is nice to give your feet a break.

Here is some 2019 knowledge that is absolutely essential in regard to socks.

In pretty well all the research I have done on dealing with blisters, I have rarely come across info on what to do to prevent getting the blisters at all!

Doesn't it make sense to not have blisters than have to heal them!

Here is the answer:

1. Always carry a pair of socks blowing in the breeze on the outside of your packsack so they can be aired out and dry when you need them.
2. Every time you stop to rest... get your boots and socks off so your feet can dry!
3. Every time you feel the need to rotate the socks you are wearing with the ones on your packsack.

Dry socks and dry feet will virtually eliminate blisters!

Chapter 11

Packs.

Full Back packs

There is a theory bantered about that says that the weight on your back should be about 10% of your body weight. Great ideal, but, in my books, not at all workable in the real world!

A person weighing 120 lbs would only be able to carry 12 lbs on their back. If the backpack weighs 5 lbs, that doesn't leave much weight for carrying any supplies!

There are some very important considerations when both choosing and loading your backpack.

You might also consider including a front pack as well to allow better weight distribution and to allow you to easily access provisions, water and equipment that you might need while you are walking.

Organization is always your best friend!

Backpacks that do not provide the following items should be excluded from consideration for any kind of walking activity. They likely will not serve your purpose well and may just cause unnecessary discomfort or even damage to your body when carried for long periods.

The bag you purchase should be of a quality adequate to your needs as well. After all, you do want it to make it through your journey in one piece!

Things to consider when choosing a full backpack

- Backpack should be the appropriate size for the duration and nature of the hike. Too large of a bag will usually mean too much equipment and supplies being carried plus the extra weight of the larger bag adds to the overall burden as well.
- Backpacks are configured differently for men and women
- Backpack should be adjustable for your height
- Backpack itself should have a separator mesh board to prevent bag from touching your back. This allows your back to have a constant flow of air on it.
- The waist belt should be substantial and preferably mouldable to your body shape. Even better, is if the waist belt tapers in to grab onto your hips. Most guys don't have exposed hips so the belts are often not as efficient as could be.
- Pack should be either waterproof or have its own raincoat. Most packs are only water resistant as the seams will leak unless treated. A wet bag can ruin a trip!
- Shoulder straps need a cross strap to pull them together.
- Lots of pockets throughout the bag so you can separate items as you choose. There should also be an inside pocket for you to store important documents.

- Lots of straps or strapping points for tying equipment to the outside
- A water bladder pouch although I personally prefer to carry my water in a bottle to reduce the weight in my pack.

Contents of the Backpack

Make a good list of your requirements well ahead of heading out. This allows you time to adjust the list. Purchase only what you really need for the journey. Extra stock means extra weight!

Be conscious of the weight of your contents before packing or you will be conscious of it when you are walking!

Buy clothing that can be worn several times without washing to reduce weight and volume.

When loading the backpack, think of how the pack is going to rest on your body. 80% of the weight should rest on your hips

Heavier items should be kept close to your back to prevent extra stress on your back from the pack pulling back. (Think gravity!)

If you think of the loading of your bag from a physics perspective, your goal is to make sure that the weight is heaviest closest to your back to prevent your back and shoulders from being forced into unnatural stressful positions. Incorrectly loaded packs will cause an uncomfortable downward pull.

You want to ensure that you can walk as straight as possible. After all, the walk is supposed to be enjoyable!

Front Packs

At this time, there are not many companies that manufacture specifically front packs; however, a small, relaxed form backpack (a sac) will work sufficiently as a front pack. You may find you want to attach it with Velcro straps to your backpack to allow you to manage the weight distribution better and to keep it from swaying.

The front pack provides you with a place to carry anything you might need while you are walking so you do not have to stop and dig around in the big pack.

You can also use it to transfer some of the weight off your back by moving some items into the front.

I also like to carry my walking poles (downsized) between my shoulder straps and my chest when I don't need them.

Make sure it rides low enough so that it does not interfere with your view and that it sits in front of you so that it does not interfere with using your walking poles. Your front pack should fit something like that belly you have worked so hard to get rid of!

Half Packs

A half pack is a bag that fits over one shoulder much like a sling. It is small and usually has only a main pocket and possibly a side pocket. It is a great piece of equipment if you are doing local walks and only need to carry water and maybe something to eat.

Chapter 12

Walking Support Equipment

Depending on the type of walking you are doing there are different types of equipment you might want to have with you for various reasons:

- To assist you in walking in hilly terrain or if you have a physical issue that requires assistance
- To keep you safe and prevent you from getting lost
- To provide a vehicle for capturing memories

As you become a seasoned walker, your equipment list will grow and more specific to the type of walk you are choosing to do.

This will be especially true if you start participating in long walks that require multiple days to complete.

The equipment a person who was walking the Appalachian Trail in the eastern US would have a much wider equipment need since they would be camping out most of the way than a person Walking the Camino in Spain or who is doing daily walks from a base camp.

Walking Poles

Some people prefer walking with a single wooden pole while others prefer the very sophisticated metal adjustable walking poles.

What you choose as your “staff” is definitely up to you. However, if you are going to do any amount of long distance trekking, especially over varying terrain, you will be very glad you invested in whichever one works for you.

Walking poles allow you to transfer some of the weight of your backpack from your legs to the poles, so you, in effect, become four-legged. The poles will also be of immense value on steep hills as they allow you to use your upper body to help you manage the strain caused by the angle of ascent or descent.

On steep terrains, I find that two poles are better because they allow you to keep your body straighter. They also allow both of your arms to share in the work.

Personally, in my experience, I prefer a 3 piece collapsible set of poles (2). They fold down and adjust to the required length easily allowing them to be stored efficiently when not needed.

Memory Capturing Devices

I didn't know what else to call this section so we will have to live with memory capturing devices until I come up with a better phrase!

Basically, we are talking about various types of cameras. We have so many types to choose from now that one could spend the largest part of their walking budget just on capturing memories.

We have the choice of:

- SLR or their newer counterparts- digital cameras that give you a great many options in types of lenses and pictures that are as big as you could imagine depending on how much money you spent on your device. The problem I am finding with the traditional cameras is that they are just too big, bulky and heavy to pack along on a long walk where weight and space in your bag are restricted.
- Miniature cameras have come a long way in the last ten years. As long as you are not wanting to produce professional quality or really big pictures these are probably the best choice, especially if they have a built in movie camera. The big restriction with miniature cameras is the inability to change lenses so you are restricted by the cameras built in lens capacity. For most people, not a big deal.
- Cell phones or mobile devices take really great pictures within a certain range. I personally have found they are good for mid-range picture taking but forget it if you want to capture the little ducky in the pond. A big disappointment for me.
- Miniature movie cameras also have still portrait capacity with great choice of range. Works very similar to a miniature camera but there are not as many exposure options, at least not the model I am currently using.
- Ipads and notepads or tablets are great. They come in a variety of sizes and have good camera capacities. They have a lot of other non-camera options as well so can be a good choice if you only want one piece of equipment to do everything electronic.
- Helmet cams or Go Pros can be a great choice as well as they can be set to operate continuously as you wish while keeping your hands free.

Remember when you are picking out your camera that you may also need to consider adding in a tri-pod or a selfie stick and maybe a shutter release cable if you are going to do lowlight photography.

Anything beyond this, I think you have stopped walking and gone out on a photographic safari!

Having a web location to store your photos as you take them is important as well both for managing the amount of pictures on your device and if you happen to lose or break it.

Chapter 13

Get Out Walking!

It does not matter where you live or what the time of year. There is always a place to walk; even though sometimes it just might mean getting out of town for a while.

If you have the will and desire to walk, there is somewhere for you to be.

Half the fun of going on a walk is the planning of the event; whether you walk by yourself or in a group. Getting out the maps or doing research on the internet, the adrenaline starts flowing as the dreams of conquering miles of trails come into mind.

Once you have prepared yourself adequately by obtaining the right equipment, preparing some wonderful food to enjoy on your trip and having prepared your body to feel good about moving along, you will quickly move into the Zen of long distance walking.

Please remember that preparation is absolutely vital to your safety and enjoyment so take the time and spend the money to be adequately prepared. It just makes this wonderful pastime even more enjoyable.





About the Author

Monty Clayton Ritchings

There have always been two constants in my life: Nature and walking.

Nature and Walking. The two just seem to go hand in hand... or foot in foot.

Even as a small child it was important to me to get out of the house and get into nature. Fortunately, in the 1950's and 60's it was easy and safe to do. One just had to walk out the door.

The Scouting movement was a huge part of my younger years. This great organization allowed me to discover the skill, as well as my love and appreciation for enjoying nature at its best.

Over my entire life time I have enjoyed walking. Fortunately I have been blessed with the health and the lifestyle that has allowed me to enjoying many miles of pleasure all over the world.

Living in southwestern British Columbia in Canada is a walker's paradise. Walking along the many riverside trails or mountains hiking is a never ending joy.

In 2015 I had the pleasure of walking the entire 500 mile course of the Camino Frances starting in Saint Jean Pied de Port France, through the Pyrenees Mountains to Santiago de Compostela Spain. This adventure certainly tested and expanded my knowledge of how to successfully invest in, manage and complete a very long walk. The entire walk comprised 34 days of continual learning.

I seem to live with the philosophy that just because you did it once doesn't mean you really did it, so I returned again in the fall of 2017 and walked this great Camino Trail again. I guess now I feel I might have a clue about what it takes to do long distance hiking!

There are so many great places to walk in this world. I look forward to expanding my list of trails I have enjoyed and conquered and sharing them with you, my fellow walkers.

Great Walking!

Monty

Checklists

Short Walks (under 4 hours)

Fresh water with carrying holster or half or small pack
Energy bar or dark chocolate bar
Tissues
Walking sticks if going on country trails or for upper body exercise
Compass (in case no phone signal)
GPS or map
Mobile phone
Sunglasses
Hat
Raingear?

Let someone know where you are going what your route is and your expected time of return. Then check in when you return!

Full Day 4-8 hours total

Fresh water with carrying holster
Small Back pack for carrying lunch and supplies
Energy bar or dark chocolate bar
Fruit and other healthy munchies for eating along route
Bananas for potassium replacement
Electrolyte drops
Lunch or money to purchase food along route
Tissues
Small First aid kit
Blister treatment
Walking sticks if going on country trails
Compass (in case no phone signal)
GPS or map
Mobile Phone
Sunglasses
Hat
Change of socks
Raingear?

Let someone know where you are going what your route is and your expected time of return. Then check in when you return!

Full Day Over 8 hours in one day

2 litres Bottled Fresh water with carrying holster or Camel Pak
Electrolyte drops
Bananas for potassium replenishment
Back pack adequately sized for carrying food and supplies
Energy bar or dark chocolate bar
Fruit and other healthy munchies for eating along route
Food or money to purchase food along route adequate for 2 meals
Tissues
First Aid Kit
Blister Treatment
Walking sticks if going on country trails
Compass (in case no phone signal)
GPS or map
Sunglasses
Hat
Change of socks
Jacket or sweater
Raingear?
Fire starter
Knife
Emergency Blanket

Let someone know where you are going, what your route is and your expected time of return Then check in when you return!.